

Subject: waxing of circulated
copper coins

Bates, Albert C.

1927-1928

[Librarian, Connecticut Historical
Society]

Connecticut Historical Society,
Hartford, Conn.,
Nov. 17, 1927.

Mr. Sydney P. Noe, Secretary,
American Numismatic Society,
Broadway and 156th St.,
New York City.

Dear Sir:

I trust you will pardon me for my presumption in troubling you with a few questions relating to the care of choice coins. This Society has recently received, under the will of one of its members, his collection of United States coins, together with a small fund, the income of which is to be used in keeping up the collection.

The collection is fairly complete for the issues and varieties of the minor coins, the large and small cents, some of the Colonial issues, the two cents and the three and five cent nickel coins. There is also a lesser collection of the silver coins. Many of these coins are in proof condition. They come to us in a cabinet, the drawers of which are covered at the bottom with white cotton flannel. Is that a proper way to preserve the coins? Two acquaintances of mine, who have collections of United States large copper cents, tell me that they oil these cents slightly about once a year. May I ask if this is the proper way to care for these large cents?

While I am not entirely ignorant concerning care and handling of coins, having collected in a small way some years ago, I do not feel that I am an expert in this line and so I am making these inquiries of you. It is my desire to preserve the coins belonging to the Society in the best manner that I can.

Your reply to these questions will be considered as a courtesy to myself and to the Society.

Very truly yours,

Albert C. Bates

Librarian.

18th November, 1927

Mr. Albert C. Bates, Librarian,
Connecticut Historical Society,
Hartford, Conn.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your question concerning the care and preservation of coins, I would say that each year it seems to us harder to keep coins in really good condition. Those on view, despite all we can do, tarnish very badly, especially if they are placed in bright light. Even those coins put away not only become badly tarnished but a fine black film forms over them. I am inclined to think that it is the combustion of so much gasoline.

Now about cleaning coins: we really clean them no oftener than can be helped. Sometimes a simple washing in warm water will do it, that is, as regards silver, gold and nickel; a solution of ammonia will do even better. Very seldom do we use potassium cyanide. As a rule, we do not clean or wash our coins until absolutely necessary for exhibition purposes.. Coins, especially copper, should, however, have the dirt taken out. Silver and gold can be washed, but with copper the best way is to carefully pick out all the dirt with a thorn or a quill and then brush the coins with either a soft or a stiff jeweler's brush, which can have just the least bit of pure beeswax on it - not enough, however, to in any way gum the coin but simply to put the thinnest sort of surface on it..

We disapprove of oiling coins, or varnishing or lacquering them, though there is a good lacquer that can be used, an extremely thin, transparent sort. Oiling coins really oxidizes them and discolors them. Although we do not use white cotton flannel, I see no objection to it. It does, however, collect dust and becomes gritty; a vacuum cleaner might do no harm to the cabinet you speak of as you do not know how long this flannel has been in the cabinet.

Very truly yours,

Curator

Connecticut Historical Society,

Hartford, Conn.,

Oct. 6, 1928.

American Numismatic Society,

Broadway and 156th St.,

New York City.

Gentlemen:

When I was at the rooms of your Society a few months since, the Curator very kindly showed me about the rooms and also illustrated to me how he was in the habit of brushing a little wax over the copper coins to preserve them from deterioration. May I ask if it is advisable to use wax in this manner upon proof copper coins, such as the small cents or the large cents which retain their mint brightness? May I also ask if you use the wax in any instance upon silver coins, particularly silver coins that are in the proof state?

Your reply to these questions will be appreciated and considered as a courtesy to this Society.

Very truly yours,

Albert C. Bates

Librarian.

9th October, 1923

Mr. Albert C. Pates, Librarian
Connecticut Historical Society

Dear Sir:

As a rule we only wax copper coins that have been in circulation. Occasionally we do the same to a proof copper coin, but brushing wax on must be done with great care and with a softer brush; otherwise one would scratch the coin. We have never put wax on silver coins. Some collectors, however, put on a very dilute mastic varnish or extremely dilute lacquer. I understand that some such composition is used for coating fine steel work, such as safes, etc. Whatever is used should be extremely thin and colorless. We have not experimented here with this to an extent that would make us care to advise you.

Very truly yours,

Curator